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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 003069

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL JA

SUBJECT: ASO MOVES DECISIVELY TO LIMIT FALL-OUT FROM ASDF
TAMOGAMI'S REVISIONIST CLAIMS

REF: TOKYO 2976

Classified By: AMBASSADOR J. THOMAS SCHIEFFER, REASONS 1.4 (B),(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: "To say our country was an aggressor nation in World War II is a false accusation," Air Self Defense Force Chief Toshio Tamogami concluded in a prize winning essay made public on October 31. Already a delicate time politically, the government took steps to control the fallout, and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada dismissed General Tamogami from his command the same day. Reaction from China and Korea was swift, but has been directed entirely at the author of the essay, and not at the government itself. Local media have praised Prime Minister Aso for his unequivocal response. Nevertheless, the opposition has promised to summon Tamogami to the Upper House, leading to possible delays in the passage of the OEF refueling measure. End Summary.

PM Aso Acts Quickly to Mitigate the Damage

¶2. (C) An essay by Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF) Chief of Staff Toshio Tamogami that minimized Japan's wartime aggression has caused a stir and created another awkward incident for the government of Prime Minister Aso. The essay, entered in the "True Modern Historical Perspective" contest organized by a well-known conservative nationalist, questions the historical basis of the Tokyo War Crimes Trials and calls for a re-examination of the role of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). General Tamogami was relieved of his leadership position by Minister of Defense Yasukazu Hamada on October 31, the same day that the essay was made public. (Note: The mandatory retirement age for SDF personnel is 60, but Tamogami would have been able to stay on as ASDF chief until the age of 62, retiring in 2009. Stripped of his command role, he became subject to involuntary retirement immediately due to his age. The government opted to delay his retirement to allow time for additional questioning, and he retired effective November 3.) Prime Minister Taro Aso re affirmed publicly on November 1 that the essay was inappropriate given Tamogami's position.

He instructed Hamada on November 4 to punish those responsible and to ensure that there is no repeat. He told reporters the same day that there is no possibility "at all" of changing the current interpretation of the Constitution to allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense.

SDF personnel have also criticized the essay for questioning civilian control and attempting to justify the offensive use of weapons. Local press reports have skewered Tamogami for his views and questioned whether similar views are prevalent among SDF personnel, but have praised Aso for his quick and decisive response. Embassy Tokyo's MOFA counterparts were quick to contact us October 31 to denounce the essay's content and note that it runs contrary to Japan's official position on the war.

Opposition to Demand Answers in the Upper House

¶13. (C) Main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leader Ichiro Ozawa promised November 1 to raise questions regarding Tamogami's appointment during deliberations in the Upper House, noting: "The government's responsibility for appointing him as ASDF chief, knowing that he had written a similar essay before, is serious." DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama made clear the same day that the issue had not disappeared with Tamogami's dismissal. Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDP) head Mizuho Fukushima told the press on November 3 she intends "to press the Prime Minister on his views on history without fail." The additional testimony is

TOKYO 00003069 002 OF 003

likely to extend Upper House deliberations on anti-terror legislation to extend Japan's refueling efforts in the Indian Ocean in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and could delay passage of the bill beyond the expected November 7 time frame. Tamogami has stated his willingness to appear before the opposition-controlled Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee to explain his assertions.

International Response Relatively Muted

¶14. (C) China and South Korea both issued official statements on November 1 denouncing Tamogami's essay, but the international response has otherwise been negligible thus far. China expressed "shock and anger that a serving senior officer of Japan's Self-Defense Forces brazenly distorts history." South Korea blasted Tamogami for defending "past wrongdoings," and described his claims as "a distortion of history." Neither country faulted the government directly, however, choosing to focus their attacks on Tamogami himself.

Their muted response may be aimed at continuing the good will generated by Prime Minister Aso's trip to Beijing last month and by upcoming meetings on the sidelines of the financial summit and ASEAN 3. Japan is tentatively scheduled to host a trilateral summit in Fukuoka in mid-December as well.

Tamogami's Views Well Known

¶15. (C) This is not the first time that Tamogami has expressed his controversial views on historical issues or the appropriate role for the SDF. He produced a substantially similar essay for an internal SDF publication last year, and spoke out against constraints on the SDF in a university speech in May of this year. This time, however, he seems to have gone further with his arguments than in previous statements. "Our nation, which was drawn into the war by Chiang Kai-shek, was a victim," he writes in the recent essay, in which he praises the Imperial Army for "liberating" conquered Asian peoples from "tyrannical rule" and "improving their living standards." "Many Asian countries have

positively evaluated the Greater East Asia War," he adds. The United States shares the blame for drawing Japan into the war. Turning to the role of the SDF, he claims the SDF is "hamstrung and cannot move freely." Japan will never "be able to establish a system to protect itself on its own," he posits, until the country is released from the "mind-control" imposed by the Tokyo Trials and the government's interpretation of the Constitution on the exercise of the right to collective self-defense and the use of offensive weapons. Attempting to justify the claims made in his "personal essay" at a press conference announcing his retirement on November 3, he chided his critics, arguing: "A country that does not allow remarks against the official government view is just like North Korea." Tamogami has already indicated that he will accept the essay contest's 3 million yen (USD \$30,000) grand prize. He will also receive a retirement allowance of approximately USD \$600,000 for his SDF service.

Comment

¶6. (C) Embassy contacts speculate that Gen. Tamogami, who has made no secret of his views, may have chosen this particular moment to "go public" in order to take advantage of his bully pulpit before retiring next year. He certainly could not have been surprised by the response, although he did tell colleagues in recent days that he thought his job was secure.

TOKYO 00003069 003 OF 003

There is also a view that he may have hoped to start a new round of public discussion over Japan's wartime record and other historical issues. In the end, his motivation is probably the same as that of Japan's other right-wing revisionists, who see it as their patriotic duty to free Japan of the shackles of the post-war regime by denying responsibility for its aggressive actions. The unambiguous response demonstrates the government's recognition that this is clearly a minority view among the general public and the international community, and should mute any long-term backlash.

SCHIEFFER